



MULTI-HATTING COMMANDERS / SPAN OF COMMAND

Last Reviewed: 7 Nov 2014

Caution should be applied when multi-hatting commanders. Too many “hats” may distract a commander from focusing on the right level of war at the right time, or may simply overwhelm the commander with detail. Of equal importance is the fact that a commander’s staff can usually operate effectively only at one [level of war](#) at a time. **If a commander wears several hats, it is preferable that the associated responsibilities lie at the same level of war.** While it is normally inappropriate for either a Service or a functional component commander to also serve as the [joint force commander](#) (JFC), it is entirely appropriate for a [commander, Air Force forces](#), to also serve as the [joint force air component commander](#), [airspace control authority](#), [area air defense commander](#), [space coordinating authority](#), and [electronic warfare control authority](#), since all six functions lie at the [operational level of war](#) and all six functions are supported through the same command node (the [air operations center](#)). To alleviate the overload, a multi-hatted commander may delegate some functions (but not the ultimate responsibility) to appropriate deputies.

More challenging are those instances when a commander’s hats vertically span several levels of war, as in the case when the JFC (normally acting at the theater-strategic level) is also acting as a functional component commander (operational level), and also as the commander of one of the operating (tactical) units. In such cases, the commander may be inadvertently drawn to the tactical level of detail at the expense of the operational-level fight. Also, dual- or multi-hatting a functional or Service component commander as the JFC raises a special caution in itself:

“...dual-hatting a commander also means dual-hatting the commander’s staff which can result in forcing the staff to operate at the operational and tactical levels simultaneously” (Joint Publication 1, [Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States](#)).

Thus, although this option is available to [combatant commanders](#) when designing subordinate [joint task forces](#), caution is needed when vertically multi-hatting commanders, as it tends to create “part-time commanders.”
